



MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION



NATIONAL FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING CONFERENCE | 2026



23rd – 26th March 2026



Wild Waters, Mombasa



Launch, Learn, Lead:
Strengthening Foundational
Learning in Kenya.



SPONSORED BY



Gates Foundation

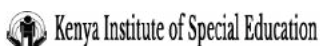


Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Introduction: Why Foundational Learning Matters.....	3
2. The Kenyan Context: Persistent Gaps in Early Grade Learning	3
3. What Works: Evidence from Research and Practice	6
4. Strategic Priorities and Recommendations	8
5. Conclusion: Toward a Coherent System for Foundational Learning	9
Executive Summary	10
1. Current Status: What Do We Know and Why Is It Important?	11
2. Evidence Base: What Evidence Exists and What Insights Does It Provide?	11
3. Effective Practices: What Works, How Does It Work, and for Whom?	12
4. Recommendations: What Practical Actions Can Stakeholders Adopt Moving Forward?	13
5. Conclusion	14
References	14
Executive Summary	15
1. Introduction	16
2. Methodology.....	16
3. Thematic Findings	17
4. Cross-Cutting Insights	19
5. Implications for Policy and Practice	19
6. Recommendations	20
7. Research/Evidence Gaps.....	20
8. References.....	20
Executive Summary	21
Subtheme 1: Education Data Systems and Quality Data for Decision Making	22
Subtheme 2: Using Data for Practice: Planning, Targeting, and Improving Teaching and Learning	23
Subtheme 3: Shared Accountability Mechanisms for Foundational Learning Outcomes	24
Subtheme 4: Monitoring, Reporting, and Learning for Continuous System Improvement.....	25
Conclusion	26
References	26

TRACK1 (2026)

Strengthening Foundational Learning in Kenya: A Systems Approach to Teaching and Learning in Early Grades

Executive Summary

Kenya has made notable progress in advancing education reforms through the Competency-Based Education (CBE) framework, with a strong emphasis on improving foundational literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills. However, despite these policy gains, many learners continue to fall below expected proficiency levels, pointing to persistent gaps between policy design and classroom implementation.

Key challenges are systemic and include weak curriculum implementation at pre-primary level, limited teacher preparedness, inadequate access to teaching and learning materials, and fragmented assessment systems. Financing disparities, particularly in early childhood education, further exacerbate inequities, while large class sizes, high learner-textbook ratios, and predominantly teacher-centered pedagogies constrain effective learning at the primary level.

Evidence from Kenya and global contexts shows that improved foundational learning outcomes are achieved through coherent, system-wide approaches. Effective practices include aligning curriculum, instructional materials, and assessments; strengthening continuous, practice-based teacher professional development with coaching; and using assessment data to inform instruction. Additionally, play-based learning, mother-tongue instruction, and socio-emotional learning have demonstrated significant benefits, while targeted remedial programs have shown rapid gains for struggling learners.

To address these challenges, priority actions include ensuring minimum learning conditions, strengthening teacher capacity, institutionalizing assessment systems, scaling evidence-based pedagogies, expanding remedial interventions, enhancing data use and accountability, and promoting community engagement.

Achieving meaningful progress will require a shift from fragmented interventions to a coherent systems approach that ensures all learners acquire foundational skills essential for lifelong learning and national development.

1. Introduction: Why Foundational Learning Matters

Foundational learning, encompassing literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills, is the cornerstone upon which all future learning is built. The ability to read with comprehension, reason with numbers, and interact socially equips learners not only for progression through the education system but also for meaningful participation in society and the workforce.

However, across Africa, fewer than half of 10-year-olds achieve minimum reading proficiency, underscoring a systemic learning crisis. In Kenya, nearly a decade into the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), there is strong policy alignment around improving foundational learning outcomes. The Presidential Working Party on Education Reforms emphasized the need for structured foundational learning guidelines, reinforcing the centrality of early grade learning.

Global evidence demonstrates that successful foundational learning reforms, such as those in Sobral, are anchored on:

- High-quality, aligned teaching and learning materials (TLMs).
- Continuous, curriculum-aligned teacher professional development.
- Regular, data-driven assessments.
- Strong accountability systems supported by political will.
- [Inclusive, engaging and adaptive \(IEA\)](#) pedagogical approaches.

Between 2000 and 2004, [Sobral](#) increased learner proficiency in literacy and numeracy from 48% to 92%, demonstrating the transformative potential of coherent, system-wide reforms.

[Learning Generation Initiative \(LGI\)'s work](#) demonstrates Kenya, Ghana, and Rwanda's education's policies' alignment with IEA, underscoring the countries' recognition of the place of IEA in promoting foundational learning, especially in advancing inclusive and holistic learning.

2. The Kenyan Context: Persistent Gaps in Early Grade Learning

2.1 Curriculum Implementation and Systemic Constraints

Despite strong policy frameworks, implementation challenges persist, particularly at pre-primary level. Weak quality assurance systems and unclear supervisory mandates limit accountability. Although most ECDE centres are domiciled within primary schools, head teachers often lack explicit responsibility for overseeing pre-primary instruction.

Financing gaps further exacerbate inequities. Unlike primary education, pre-primary lacks a standardized capitation framework, resulting in limited access to learning materials and inequitable resource allocation.

Teacher preparedness is also a major concern. Evidence from Kirinyaga indicates that over 70% of pre-primary teachers have not received CBE-related training (Mizizi, 2026), limiting their capacity to effectively implement CBC.

Assessment practices remain fragmented. The low uptake of the Kenya School Readiness Assessment Tool (KSRAT) undermines the availability of reliable data at the transition to Grade 1, leaving receiving teachers without critical insights into learners' competencies.

At primary level, challenges persist:

- High learner-textbook ratios (3.2 in numeracy; 1.9 in literacy) (APHRC, unpublished)
- Large class sizes (17.2:1 in Makueni vs. 64.5:1 in Nairobi)
- Predominance of whole-class instruction (84.5% literacy; 62.8% numeracy)

These factors collectively constrain the shift toward learner-centered pedagogies envisioned under CBC.

Foundational Learning in ASAL Contexts

Foundational learning in ASAL regions (e.g., Wajir and Mandera) remains constrained by:

- Weak pre-service teacher preparation
- Limited continuous professional development (CPD) access
- Low teacher confidence in **competency-based pedagogy**
- Minimal use of child-centered and play-based approaches
- Limited inclusive education practices
- Inconsistent use of teaching and learning materials (TLMs)
- Weak institutional support systems
- Broader contextual barriers: poverty, mobility, and fragile education systems

INSPIRED Programme Response and Results

The INSPIRED programme addresses these challenges through a **layered teacher support model**, including:

- Competency-based teacher training
- School-based instructional coaching and mentorship
- Provision of TLMs
- Peer learning via Communities of Practice (CoPs)
- Strengthening county-level education systems

Coaching emerged as the **most effective intervention**, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Case Study: EDT's INSPIRED programme for Strengthening Foundational Learning in Wajir County

In Wajir County, foundational learning outcomes were low due to limited teacher support, weak pedagogical skills, and minimal access to structured teaching resources. Many teachers relied on traditional, teacher-centered methods, with little adaptation for diverse learners.

Intervention

The INSPIRED programme introduced a **school-embedded coaching model**, where instructional coaches worked directly with teachers through:

- Regular classroom observations
- Targeted feedback sessions
- Demonstration lessons
- Ongoing mentorship

Teachers also participated in **peer learning communities** and received structured TLMs aligned to the competency-based curriculum.

Results?

- Teachers demonstrated:
 - Improved use of learner-centered approaches
 - Increased confidence in lesson delivery
 - Better integration of TLMs

Classroom practices shifted from theory-heavy instruction to **interactive, practical teaching methods**, directly improving learner engagement.

Impact?

The intervention contributed to:

- Improved translation of training into classroom practice
- Strengthened local capacity through involvement of **county ECD officials and headteachers**
- Greater sustainability through institutionalized coaching systems

Key Lesson

Sustained, school-based instructional coaching is more effective than one-off training in improving teaching quality and foundational learning outcomes in ASAL contexts.

3. What Works: Evidence from Research and Practice

3.1 Alignment of Pedagogical Inputs

[Evidence](#)¹ consistently shows that alignment across curriculum, textbooks, teacher guides, and assessments significantly improves learning outcomes. According to UNESCO (2025), coherence across these elements is critical for effective curriculum delivery.

Aligned TLMs and structured lesson plans have demonstrated strong impacts on learning outcomes (Fleisch et al., 2014; Piper et al., 2014; Sapire et al., 2022).

3.2 Effective Pedagogies for Foundational Skills

[Play-based learning](#) is particularly effective in early childhood, improving outcomes by up to four months. The [Sabre Education model](#) in Ghana demonstrates large-scale success, with over 80% of learners achieving age-appropriate literacy and numeracy.

Language of instruction is equally critical. Evidence shows that children learn best when taught in a familiar language:

- UNESCO GEM reports highlight improved retention and comprehension
- World Bank (2021) confirms improved learning outcomes with mother-tongue instruction

The LITES study further demonstrates:

- Strong transfer of decoding skills across languages
- Improved reading outcomes when learners begin in a [familiar language](#).

As noted by Kwame Akyeampong (2025), language is not a technical issue but an “equity hinge” in education.

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) also plays a crucial role. Meta-analyses involving over 270,000 learners show:

- +11 percentile improvement in academic outcomes.
- Reduced behavioural challenges.
- Improved classroom climate.

¹ Almuhsin, E., Soh, B., Li, A., & Ullah, A. (2023). Systematic literature review on e-coaching effectiveness.

Scheerens, J. (2017). Opportunity to learn, curriculum alignment and test preparation. Springer.

World Bank. (2020). Realizing the future of learning: From learning poverty to learning for everyone, everywhere. Washington, DC.

3.3 Remedial and Accelerated Learning

Targeted remediation significantly improves learning outcomes. The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) implemented by Mizizi demonstrated that over 60% of learners achieved story-level reading within 30 days.

Similarly, the [African Population and Health Research Center Developing Readers Study](#) showed a reduction in non-readers from 43.3% to 18.9%.

These findings confirm that short, targeted interventions can yield rapid gains, particularly for struggling learners.

3.4 Assessment-Informed Instruction

Effective systems use assessment not just for accountability but for **instructional improvement**. Initiatives by [CEMASTE](#) demonstrate the value of:

- Error analysis.
- Lesson study.
- Collaborative reflection.

These approaches enable teachers to identify misconceptions and adapt instruction accordingly.

However, Kenya faces challenges:

- Low KSRAT uptake.
- Over-reliance on commercial assessments.
- Limited teacher capacity in assessment design.

3.5 Teacher Professional Development and Coaching

Continuous professional development (CPD) is critical for sustained improvement. Evidence shows that:

- Practice-based training with coaching is more effective than lecture-based models
- Peer learning and micro-teaching improve teacher competence
- Cascade training models often lead to knowledge dilution

Programs such as those by Dignitas and SHOFCO demonstrate the effectiveness of school-based coaching and communities of practice.

However, gaps remain in:

- Subject-specific pedagogy training (literacy and numeracy).
- Preparation of teacher educators.
- Alignment between training and classroom realities.

4. Strategic Priorities and Recommendations

4.1 Ensure Minimum Learning Conditions

- Define and provide a minimum learning package per child (books, workbooks, readers)
- Equip classrooms with instructional resource kits
- Anchor pre-primary capitation in policy

4.2 Strengthen Teacher Capacity

- Scale up national teacher retooling on CBE
- Institutionalize continuous professional development and coaching
- Establish instructional coaching systems with regular school visits

4.3 Institutionalize Assessment Systems

- Fully roll out KSRAT and integrate it into transition processes
- Develop digital platforms for learner tracking
- Create national assessment item banks aligned to CBC

4.4 Promote Evidence-Based Pedagogies

- Scale play-based learning approaches
- Support mother-tongue instruction with structured transition models
- Integrate SEL into classroom practice

4.5 Scale Remedial and Accelerated Learning

- Adopt national remediation guidelines
- Scale proven models such as ALP
- Promote school-level practices (reading culture, math clubs)

4.6 Strengthen Accountability and Data Use

- Establish learning benchmarks and dashboards
- Promote data-driven decision-making
- Incentivize performance at school and system levels

4.7 Enhance Community and System Engagement

- Redefine parents as co-educators
- Promote school-community accountability dialogues
- Leverage youth through national volunteer programs

[LGI's evidence](#) further recommends the need to have inclusive policies that not only mention teachers with disabilities, but also those that offer guidance on implementation and financing whilst setting benchmarks or targets to track progress.

5. Conclusion: Toward a Coherent System for Foundational Learning

Kenya has made significant strides in policy reform through CBE. However, the realization of improved foundational learning outcomes depends on bridging the gap between policy and classroom practice.

The evidence is clear: systems that succeed do so by aligning curriculum, pedagogy, materials, teacher support, and accountability mechanisms into a coherent, well-functioning whole.

The opportunity now is to transition from fragmented interventions to system-wide coherence, ensuring that every child, regardless of location or background, acquires the foundational skills necessary for lifelong learning.

References/Link to Resources

https://cemastea.ac.ke/sites/default/files/2025-11/Secondary%20School%20Policy%20Brief_0.pdf

<https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2024/Sptlight%20on%20Basic%20Education%20Completion%20and%20Foundational%20Learning.pdf?ver=2024-10-24-102817-910>

<https://palnetwork.org/every-language-teaches-us/>

https://curate.nd.edu/articles/report/LANGUAGE_OF_INSTRUCTION_AND_TRANSITION_IN_EDUCATION_SYSTEMS_LITES_KENYA_FINAL_REPORT/28883780?file=54023228

<https://journalofcmsd.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/LESSON-STUDY.pdf>

<https://ziziafrique.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/CEMASTEZA-Final-Error-Analysis-14-03-2025.pdf>

https://www.gesci.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ADAPT_Research_Summary_Report_-_Kenya.pdf

<https://aphrc.org/publication/celebrating-reading-milestones-graduating-from-a-zero-reader-to-a-confident-reader/>

<https://aphrc.org/publication/developing-readers-study-designing-a-structured-remediation-approach-to-support-developing-readers-in-primary-schools-in-kenya/>

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years/toolkit/play-based-learning>

<https://sabre.education/our-work/transforming/>

<https://crpe.org/story-of-sobral/>

TRACK 2 (2026)

Strengthening Policy, Governance, and System Alignment for Foundational Learning in Kenya: A Synthesis of Evidence and Practice

Executive Summary

Kenya has made notable progress in expanding access to education and developing policy frameworks to support foundational learning. However, these gains have not consistently translated into improved and equitable learning outcomes, particularly for learners in marginalized contexts. A central challenge lies in the fragmentation of policy frameworks, weak intergovernmental coordination, and misalignment across actors and systems, which collectively constrain effective delivery of foundational learning.

This synthesis examines the policy and governance dimensions of foundational learning in Kenya, drawing on national experiences and global evidence. It highlights that while multiple policies and frameworks exist, including early childhood development, language policy, and assessment tools such as the Kenya School Readiness Assessment Tool, these are often insufficiently harmonized, leading to duplication and gaps in implementation. Evidence shows that policy coherence and system alignment are critical enablers of improved learning outcomes ([World Bank, 2019](#); [UNESCO, 2022](#)).

The synthesis further demonstrates that effective foundational learning systems require strong coordination between national and county governments, aligned partner engagement, and strengthened instructional leadership at the school level. Case studies from counties such as Bungoma and programs like Napenda Kusoma and INSPIRED illustrate how coordinated governance and leadership can improve implementation.

To address existing challenges, the synthesis recommends strengthening policy coherence, establishing a formal intergovernmental coordination framework, improving institutional leadership, enhancing partner coordination through data systems, and reinforcing school-level governance structures. These actions are critical for ensuring that Kenya's education system delivers equitable and high-quality foundational learning outcomes for all learners.

1. Current Status: What Do We Know and Why Is It Important?

Kenya has made significant strides in expanding access to education and developing multiple policy frameworks to support foundational learning; however, gaps in coherence, coordination, and governance continue to limit effective implementation and equitable learning outcomes.

A key challenge is the **fragmentation of policy frameworks related to foundational learning**, including early childhood development, language policy, and assessment systems. While these policies exist, they are often not harmonized, leading to duplication and inefficiencies. [Evidence](#) shows that policy fragmentation reduces implementation effectiveness and weakens accountability systems, particularly in decentralized contexts (World Bank, [2020](#)).

Efforts such as the **Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) Policy Framework** and foundational learning guidelines are ongoing, yet delays in their finalization hinder the establishment of a unified approach to early learning. The absence of a comprehensive framework limits the ability to track children's developmental trajectories and ensure smooth transitions across early learning stages.

Another critical issue is the **lack of a structured intergovernmental coordination framework** between national and county governments. Although responsibilities are shared, there is limited clarity on how these roles translate into joint planning, financing, and implementation. Global evidence indicates that weak intergovernmental coordination undermines service delivery and contributes to inequities in decentralized education systems (UNESCO, [2022](#)).

Institutional challenges further exacerbate these issues. Despite the presence of key institutions such as the Teachers Service Commission and county governments, overlapping mandates and unclear roles, particularly in ECDE governance, create inefficiencies. Evidence suggests that unclear institutional roles weaken reform implementation and reduce system effectiveness (Bruns et al., [2018](#)).

Additionally, **fragmented coordination among development partners and implementers** leads to duplication in some areas and gaps in others. Research shows that poor coordination results in inefficient resource use and inconsistent outcomes across regions (OECD, [2020](#)).

At the school level, governance challenges persist, particularly in integrating ECDE centres within primary school systems, which weakens instructional leadership and accountability.

2. Evidence Base: What Evidence Exists and What Insights Does It Provide?

A robust body of global and national evidence demonstrates that effective foundational learning systems depend on strong governance, policy coherence, and system alignment, in addition to classroom-level interventions.

Evidence shows that policy coherence, alignment between curriculum, assessment, teacher development, and governance, significantly improves learning outcomes (World Bank, [2019](#)).

[Research](#) further indicates that **decentralized systems require strong coordination mechanisms to ensure equitable service delivery**, as weak coordination often leads to disparities across regions (UNESCO, 2022).

Teacher and school leadership are also critical determinants of learning. Evidence shows that **effective instructional leadership improves teaching quality and student outcomes**, particularly in resource-constrained settings (OECD, [2016](#)).

Additionally, integrated data systems are essential for effective governance. Studies show that **data-driven systems improve planning, accountability, and coordination across actors** (World Bank, 2020).

In Kenya, assessments by [Uwezo East Africa \(2021\)](#) highlight persistent disparities in learning outcomes, particularly among marginalized learners.

Overall, the evidence underscores that system-level alignment is a prerequisite for sustained improvements in foundational learning outcomes.

3. Effective Practices: What Works, How Does It Work, and for Whom?

Evidence from Kenya and globally shows that effective foundational learning systems are those that integrate governance, coordination, and instructional leadership across all levels of the education system.

3.1 Intergovernmental Coordination Mechanisms

Structured platforms for engagement between national and county governments enable joint planning and accountability.

Case Study: Bungoma County Coordination Model.

Regular forums convened by the County Commissioner bring together government actors and partners, improving coordination and reducing duplication. This demonstrates how localized governance mechanisms can strengthen alignment and improve implementation outcomes.

3.2 National–Partner Coordination Platforms

Platforms such as the Education Development Partners Coordination Group (EDPCG) enable alignment of partner investments with government priorities.

Evidence shows that coordinated partnerships improve efficiency and reduce fragmentation (World Bank, 2020).

3.3 Instructional Leadership and School Governance

Strong school leadership ensures alignment between policy and classroom practice.

Case Studies: Napenda Kusoma & INSPIRED Programs.

These programs demonstrate how headteachers can provide instructional leadership across ECDE and primary levels, improving continuity in learning and strengthening accountability.

3.4 Integrated Data and Coordination Systems

Effective systems use shared data platforms to track progress and coordinate actors.

Evidence indicates that integrated data systems enhance transparency and improve decision-making (World Bank, 2020).

3.5 Peer Learning and Cross-County Collaboration

Platforms facilitated by the Council of Governors support knowledge sharing across counties. Such approaches have been shown to accelerate policy implementation and improve outcomes in decentralized systems (OECD, 2020).

4. Recommendations: What Practical Actions Can Stakeholders Adopt Moving Forward?

Drawing from the evidence and practices, following six strategic actions are necessary to strengthen foundational learning systems in Kenya.

- I. First, there is a need to finalize and operationalize key policy frameworks, including the IECD policy and foundational learning guidelines, to ensure coherence and alignment across the system.
- II. Second, Kenya should establish a formal intergovernmental coordination framework, clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and mechanisms for collaboration between national and county governments.
- III. Third, stakeholders should strengthen institutional leadership and capacity, particularly at county and school levels, to improve implementation and accountability.
- IV. Fourth, there is a need to enhance partner coordination through integrated data systems, ensuring alignment between government priorities and partner interventions.
- V. Fifth, efforts should focus on strengthening school-level governance and instructional leadership, including better integration of ECDE within primary school systems.
- VI. Finally, existing coordination platforms such as those led by the Council of Governors and national-level forums should be strengthened to support continuous engagement and peer learning.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, strengthening foundational learning in Kenya requires moving beyond a sole focus on access and pedagogy to address the systemic enablers of effective delivery, namely policy coherence, governance, and coordination. While the country has established a strong foundation through progressive education reforms and institutional structures, persistent fragmentation and misalignment continue to limit the realization of equitable learning outcomes.

Evidence consistently demonstrates that well-aligned systems, where policies, institutions, resources, and actors work in a coordinated manner, are more likely to deliver sustained improvements in learning. Experiences from both Kenya and comparable global contexts further show that targeted, integrated approaches, linking national policy direction with county-level implementation and school-level leadership, are critical for translating intent into impact.

Moving forward, priority lies in operationalizing existing frameworks, strengthening intergovernmental collaboration, and embedding accountability across all levels of the system. Equally important is ensuring that coordination mechanisms are not only established but are functional, inclusive, and data informed.

Ultimately, achieving universal foundational learning will depend on Kenya's ability to build a coherent, inclusive, and responsive education system that leaves no learner behind, particularly those most at risk of exclusion.

References

- Bruns, B., Filmer, D., & Patrinos, H. A. (2019). Making schools work: New evidence on accountability reforms. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>
- OECD. (2016). School leadership for learning. <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/leadership>
- OECD. (2020). Education governance in decentralised systems. <https://www.oecd.org/education>
- UNESCO. (2022). Global education monitoring report: Inclusion and education. <https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/inclusion>
- Uwezo. (2021). Are our children learning? <https://www.twaweza.org/go/uwezo-kenya-2021-report>
- World Bank. (2019). World development report: Learning to realize education's promise. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28340>
- World Bank. (2020). Ending learning poverty. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/ending-learning-poverty>

TRACK 3 (2026)

Advancing Inclusive Foundational Learning in Kenya: Evidence, Practice, and Policy Directions for Equitable Learning Systems

Executive Summary

Across Kenya and much of Sub-Saharan Africa, significant progress in expanding access to education has not translated into equitable learning outcomes. A large proportion of children complete early grades without acquiring grade-level foundational literacy and numeracy skills, with disparities particularly pronounced among learners from marginalized communities, including those in informal settlements, rural areas, refugee-hosting regions, and children with disabilities ([Uwezo, 2021](#); [World Bank, 2021](#)). These patterns reflect systemic inequalities that continue to shape learning opportunities and outcomes.

This evidence synthesis examines how inclusive foundational learning can be strengthened by analyzing evidence and practice across five key domains: structural barriers, equitable access, financing and workforce capacity, inclusive pedagogy and language, and parental and community engagement. The synthesis draws on research and programmatic experiences in Kenya and globally, highlighting patterns in what works, for whom, and under what conditions.

The evidence suggests that improving foundational learning outcomes requires integrated approaches that combine targeted support for marginalized learners, strengthened teacher capacity, inclusive pedagogy, and community engagement. Case studies from organizations such as Mizizi Elimu Afrika (formerly Zizi Afrique Foundation), Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO), and The Action Foundation (TAF) demonstrate that interventions combining community-based support, differentiated instruction, and inclusive systems can significantly improve participation and learning outcomes.

The synthesis recommends prioritizing equity-focused financing, scaling structured and inclusive pedagogical approaches, strengthening teacher development systems, and institutionalizing parental engagement. Addressing these areas holistically will be critical for building inclusive education systems capable of delivering foundational skills for all learners.

1. Introduction

Foundational literacy and numeracy are widely recognized as the building blocks of lifelong learning and human development ([World Bank, 2019](#)). In Kenya, policy reforms such as the introduction of free primary education and the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) have significantly expanded access to schooling and emphasized the importance of competency development in early grades. However, access has not consistently translated into learning, with many learners failing to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills during the foundational years.

This challenge reflects a broader global learning crisis, where a substantial proportion of children in low- and middle-income countries are unable to read and understand simple texts by age ten ([World Bank, 2021](#)). In Kenya, national and citizen-led assessments continue to highlight disparities in learning outcomes across socioeconomic status, geography, and learner characteristics ([Uwezo, 2021](#)). These disparities point to systemic barriers that limit equitable access to quality learning opportunities.

This synthesis is motivated by the need to better understand how inclusive approaches can address these disparities and improve foundational learning outcomes for all learners. It focuses on identifying patterns across existing evidence and practice, rather than presenting isolated findings, with particular attention to interventions targeting marginalized populations.

The synthesis seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the key barriers to inclusive foundational learning in Kenya?
- What does existing evidence suggest about effective approaches to addressing these barriers?
- What practices have demonstrated success in improving inclusive learning outcomes?
- What policy and programmatic actions are required to strengthen inclusive foundational learning systems?

By bringing together evidence and practice, the synthesis aims to inform policy and programmatic decisions that can support the development of more equitable and effective education systems.

2. Methodology

This evidence synthesis draws on a combination of [peer-reviewed literature](#), policy reports, program evaluations, and [practitioner-generated knowledge](#) related to foundational learning and inclusive education in Kenya and comparable contexts. Sources include global reports from organizations such as UNESCO and the [World Bank](#), regional and national assessments such as [Uwezo](#), and documentation from civil society organizations implementing education programs.

The selection of sources was guided by relevance to five thematic domains: structural barriers, equitable access, financing and workforce capacity, inclusive pedagogy and language, and community engagement. Priority was given to studies and reports that provide empirical evidence on learning outcomes, as well as those documenting practical interventions and implementation experiences.

The synthesis adopts a thematic analytical approach, organizing evidence into key domains and identifying patterns, consistencies, and divergences across studies. Rather than presenting individual studies in isolation, the analysis focuses on drawing connections between findings to generate broader insights about what works and why.

Case studies from organizations including Mizizi Elimu Afrika, SHOFCO, and The Action Foundation are incorporated to illustrate how evidence translates into practice. These examples were selected based on their relevance to inclusive foundational learning and their documented impact on marginalized learners.

While the synthesis aims to be comprehensive, it is limited by the availability of documented evidence, particularly in areas such as foundational numeracy and long-term impact evaluations of inclusive education interventions. Nevertheless, the combination of research and practice provides a robust basis for identifying actionable insights.

3. Thematic Findings

3.1 Structural Barriers to Inclusive Foundational Learning

[Evidence](#) consistently shows that structural inequalities, including poverty, disability, and geographic marginalization, are strongly associated with poor learning outcomes. Children from low-income households often face multiple disadvantages, including limited access to learning materials, inadequate nutrition, and constrained learning environments at home. Similarly, children with disabilities experience exclusion due to inaccessible infrastructure and limited specialized support ([UNESCO, 2020](#)).

[Across studies](#), these factors are not isolated but intersect to create cumulative disadvantages that affect learners' ability to acquire foundational skills. Early learning gaps linked to these structural barriers often persist and widen over time.

Case Study: SHOFCO Community Learning Ecosystem

In response to these challenges, SHOFCO has developed an integrated community-based learning model in Nairobi's informal settlements. Through a network of community libraries and youth centres, the initiative provides access to learning materials, mentorship, and safe study spaces for over 300,000 children annually. Beyond improving access, the model fosters a culture of reading and learning within communities, demonstrating how localized, ecosystem-based approaches can mitigate structural barriers.

3.2 Equitable Access to Foundational Learning

While enrolment rates have improved, access to quality learning opportunities remains uneven. [Evidence](#) even indicates that learners in informal settlements, remote rural areas, and refugee contexts often experience overcrowded classrooms, limited instructional time, and insufficient teaching resources.

[Evidence](#) suggests that early learning gaps emerge quickly when learners lack consistent access to quality instruction, and without targeted support, these gaps are difficult to close ([World Bank, 2024](#)). This pattern is particularly evident among displaced and marginalized populations.

Case Study: Mizizi Holiday Learning Camps.

Mizizi's Holiday Learning Camps illustrate how targeted interventions can address learning gaps. By applying Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methodologies, the program groups learners by competency rather than age, enabling more tailored instruction. Implemented in Bungoma, Kakamega, and Machakos Counties, the camps have demonstrated measurable improvements in literacy and numeracy within short intervention periods, highlighting the effectiveness of accelerated learning approaches.

3.3 Financing and Workforce Capacity

[Evidence](#) highlights teacher quality and resource allocation as critical determinants of learning outcomes. However, disparities in financing and teacher distribution continue to affect marginalized regions, limiting the effectiveness of education systems.

[Global](#) and [local studies](#) consistently show that investments in teacher training, structured pedagogy, and inclusive education resources significantly improve learning outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged learners.

Case Study: The Action Foundation – Assistive Technology for Inclusion

The Action Foundation's work demonstrates the importance of combining assistive technologies with teacher and caregiver support. Through programs such as Innovation to Inclusion (i2i), the organization has expanded access to assistive devices and trained educators in ASAL counties, including Kajiado to support children with disabilities. This integrated approach has improved school participation and engagement among learners who were previously excluded.

3.4 Inclusive Pedagogy, Language, and Learning Materials

[Evidence](#) strongly supports the role of inclusive and learner-centred pedagogy in improving foundational learning outcomes. [Studies](#) show that mother-tongue instruction enhances comprehension and literacy development, while differentiated instruction enables teachers to address diverse learning needs ([Piper et al., 2018](#)).

However, implementation remains uneven, with many classrooms continuing to rely on traditional teaching approaches that limit learner engagement.

Across contexts, [programs that combine structured pedagogy, multilingual materials, and teacher coaching](#) show the most consistent improvements in learning outcomes.

3.5 Parental Engagement and Community Partnerships

[Evidence](#) indicates that parental involvement is a significant predictor of improved learning outcomes, including higher attendance, better literacy development, and increased learner motivation ([Epstein, 2018](#)).

However, many parents lack the tools and knowledge needed to effectively support learning at home, particularly in low-resource settings.

Case Study: Mizizi Parent Empowerment Initiative

Mizizi's parent engagement model in Bungoma County demonstrates how structured support can strengthen home learning environments. Through teacher training, home visits, and learning and engagement guides, the program equips both teachers and parents with practical strategies to support literacy and numeracy. Early results show increased parental engagement and improved learner participation, illustrating the value of community-based learning ecosystems.

4. Cross-Cutting Insights

Several cross-cutting insights emerge from the synthesis.

- i. **Inequality is cumulative and multidimensional**, with structural, pedagogical, and resource-related factors interacting to shape learning outcomes. Addressing any single factor in isolation is unlikely to produce sustained improvements.
- ii. **Integrated and ecosystem-based approaches are consistently more effective** than isolated interventions. Programs that combine instructional support, community engagement, and targeted learner support demonstrate stronger and more sustained impacts.
- iii. **Teacher capacity is central across all domains**, acting as a key enabler of inclusive pedagogy, effective use of materials, and learner engagement.
- iv. **Targeted interventions for marginalized learners are essential**, as universal approaches often fail to address the specific needs of disadvantaged groups.
- v. **Evidence on foundational numeracy and long-term outcomes remains limited**, indicating a need for greater research and investment in these areas.

5. Implications for Policy and Practice

The evidence presented in this synthesis suggests that improving foundational learning requires a shift from access-focused policies to learning- and equity-focused systems.

For policymakers, this implies prioritizing equity in resource allocation and embedding inclusion within all aspects of education planning. For practitioners, it highlights the importance of adopting differentiated and learner-centred approaches that respond to diverse needs.

Education systems must also strengthen the integration of school and community efforts, recognizing that learning extends beyond classrooms. Programs that engage parents and communities can significantly enhance learning outcomes, particularly in low-resource settings.

Finally, the importance of data-driven decision-making is evident. Strengthening assessment systems and ensuring that data informs practice will be critical for identifying learning gaps and targeting interventions effectively.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations suffice if inclusive learning is to take place. Thus, there is the need to:

- Prioritize equity-focused financing models targeting marginalized regions and learners.
- Scale structured and inclusive pedagogical approaches, including TaRL and differentiated instruction.
- Strengthen teacher professional development with a focus on inclusive education practices.
- Expand access to assistive technologies and inclusive learning materials.
- Institutionalize parental engagement strategies within education systems.
- Support community-based learning ecosystems as complementary learning spaces.

7. Research/Evidence Gaps

Despite growing evidence on foundational learning, several gaps remain.

There is limited research on **foundational numeracy**, particularly in comparison to literacy-focused interventions. Additionally, there is a lack of **long-term impact evaluations** of inclusive education programs, making it difficult to assess sustainability.

Evidence on **scaling community-based interventions** and integrating them into national systems is also limited. Furthermore, more research is needed on how **context-specific factors**, such as language diversity and cultural practices, influence learning outcomes.

Addressing these gaps will be critical for strengthening the evidence base and informing more effective policies and programs.

8. References

- Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teacher education around the world.
- Epstein, J. L. (2018). School, family, and community partnerships.
- Piper, B., et al. (2018). Early grade literacy and mother-tongue instruction.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2017). How to differentiate instruction in academically diverse classrooms.
- UNESCO. (2020). Global education monitoring report.
- UNESCO. (2022). Inclusion and education report.
- UNHCR. (2021). Refugee education report.
- Uwezo. (2021). Are our children learning?
- World Bank. (2020). Ending learning poverty.
- World Bank. (2022). State of global learning poverty.

TRACK 4 (2026)

Data and Shared Accountability for Foundational Learning in Kenya.

Making the foundational learning system work together through aligned financing, coordination, and accountability.

Executive Summary

Kenya has made strong progress in expanding access to education and developing data systems such as KEMIS, but foundational learning outcomes, especially in literacy and numeracy, remain uneven. Key challenges include fragmented and incomplete data systems, limited use of data in classroom instruction, weak alignment of accountability mechanisms across stakeholders, and monitoring systems that focus more on compliance than continuous improvement.

Evidence from Kenyan programs (such as Tusome, PRIMR, EIDU, and SHOFCO) and global research shows that improving learning outcomes requires integrated data systems, stronger teacher capacity to use data, coordinated accountability frameworks, and effective feedback loops that link classroom practice with system-level decisions.

To address these issues, priority actions include integrating and expanding education data systems, strengthening teachers' ability to use data for instruction, aligning stakeholders around shared performance indicators, and promoting continuous learning through adaptive and improvement-focused monitoring systems.

Introduction

Kenya has made notable progress in expanding access to basic education; however, improving foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes remains a persistent challenge. Strengthening data systems, evidence use, and shared accountability mechanisms is critical to ensure that all learners acquire foundational skills. This synthesis draws on lessons from Kenyan organisations such as Usawa Agenda, EIDU Kenya, SHOFCO, and APHRC, while incorporating global evidence to inform policy and practice.

Subtheme 1: Education Data Systems and Quality Data for Decision Making

1. Current Status

Kenya has invested in education data systems, but fragmentation and gaps limit their effectiveness for decision-making.

- The **Kenya Education Management Information System (KEMIS)** has improved data collection for planning and financing (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2022).
- However, data remain fragmented across institutions such as MoE, TSC, and KICD, limiting interoperability.
- Marginalized learners, including refugees, non-formal learners, and out-of-school children, are underrepresented in national datasets (APHRC, 2023).
- Administrative data are often collected for compliance (e.g., capitation) rather than for learning improvement.

These gaps undermine evidence-based policymaking and equitable resource allocation.

2. Evidence Base

Available evidence highlights disparities in learning outcomes and weaknesses in data coverage.

- National assessments such as NASMLA show **low foundational learning outcomes**, especially in numeracy (KNEC, 2021).
- Studies such as Tusome and PRIMR demonstrate that while access is high, learning quality remains uneven (Piper et al., 2018).
- APHRC research shows that exclusion of certain teacher categories from datasets limits workforce planning (APHRC, 2023).
- Globally, the **World Bank (2021)** identifies “learning poverty” as a major challenge, with data gaps limiting effective responses.

3. Effective Practices

Emerging practices demonstrate how integrated and real-time data systems can improve learning outcomes.

- The **EIDU Kenya RCT in Murang’a County** shows how digital platforms generate real-time learner data, enabling targeted instruction (EIDU, 2023).
- Linking classroom-level data with national systems improves visibility and planning.
- Globally, countries like Estonia have demonstrated the value of integrated education data ecosystems for decision-making (OECD, 2020).

These approaches work best for teachers, policymakers, and system leaders who require timely, actionable data.

4. Recommendations

To strengthen education data systems, stakeholders should prioritize integration, inclusivity, and reliability.

- Integrate national education data systems to enable interoperability.
- Expand coverage to include marginalized learners and institutions.
- Strengthen data verification at school level.
- Harmonize data collection frameworks across institutions.

Subtheme 2: Using Data for Practice: Planning, Targeting, and Improving Teaching and Learning

1. Current Status

Although large volumes of data are collected, their use in classroom practice remains limited.

- Teachers often lack capacity to interpret and apply assessment data (Usawa Agenda, 2025).
- Data are primarily used for reporting rather than instructional improvement.

This disconnect reduces the impact of data on actual learning outcomes.

2. Evidence Base

Evidence shows persistent gaps in foundational learning linked to limited data use.

- Usawa Agenda (2025) finds that 3 in 10 Grade 6 learners cannot solve Grade 3 math problems.
- Classroom observations indicate teacher-centered pedagogy dominates, limiting learner engagement.
- Global evidence shows that data-informed instruction significantly improves learning outcomes (Datnow & Park, 2018).

3. Effective Practices

Targeted interventions demonstrate how data can improve teaching and learning.

- EIDU's personalized learning tools help teachers identify and support struggling learners.
- SHOFCO's teacher communities of practice enable collaborative data use to adjust instruction.
- Globally, structured teacher data use models (e.g., in the US and UK) improve instructional quality (OECD, 2019).

These approaches are most effective for teachers in resource-constrained settings who need simple, actionable data tools.

4. Recommendations

Strengthening data use in classrooms requires practical and teacher-centered approaches.

- Build teacher capacity in data interpretation and use.
- Provide simple dashboards and summaries.
- Integrate data use into teacher professional development.

Subtheme 3: Shared Accountability Mechanisms for Foundational Learning Outcomes

1. Current Status

Accountability mechanisms in Kenya remain fragmented across actors.

- Government, NGOs, and development partners use separate frameworks and indicators.
- This fragmentation limits coordinated action toward shared goals.

A lack of shared accountability weakens system-wide impact.

2. Evidence Base

Evidence shows that coordinated accountability improves education outcomes.

- Usawa Agenda's analysis influenced the 2025 Basic Education Regulations, highlighting teacher shortages (Usawa Agenda, 2025).
- Research shows high pupil-teacher ratios negatively affect learning (UNESCO, 2022).
- Globally, aligned accountability frameworks improve system performance (World Bank, 2018).

3. Effective Practices

Collaborative approaches demonstrate the value of shared accountability.

- Partnerships between Usawa Agenda, SHOFCO, and Dignitas align data with interventions.
- Joint use of assessment data enables coordinated teacher support.

These models work best where multiple actors align around shared learning goals.

4. Recommendations

Strengthening shared accountability requires alignment and coordination.

- Develop common indicators for foundational learning.
- Strengthen data-sharing mechanisms across institutions.
- Align monitoring frameworks across stakeholders.

Subtheme 4: Monitoring, Reporting, and Learning for Continuous System Improvement

1. Current Status

Monitoring systems focus more on compliance than learning improvement.

- Data are collected regularly but not always used for continuous improvement.
- Feedback loops between classrooms and system-level decision-making are weak.

This limits adaptive and responsive education systems.

2. Evidence Base

Evidence highlights the importance of feedback loops for improving teaching and learning.

- SHOFCO programs show that structured coaching and data review improve teaching practices (SHOFCO, 2024).
- Over 80% of schools in these programs established systems for reviewing learner progress.
- Globally, continuous improvement models (e.g., Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles) enhance education systems (Bryk et al., 2015).

3. Effective Practices

Successful models emphasize continuous feedback and learning cycles.

- SHOFCO schools use lesson observations, coaching, and data reviews to inform school and classrooms' decision-making.
- Teachers participate in professional learning communities to adapt instruction.
- [LGI](#) underscores 'continuous adaptation, real-time feedback, and the implementation of data-driven decision-making that support the program's success'.

These approaches are effective for school leaders and teachers in dynamic learning environments.

4. Recommendations

To strengthen monitoring and learning systems, stakeholders should focus on feedback and adaptation.

- Link assessment data with teacher support systems.
- Promote regular review of learner progress.
- Shift from compliance-focused to learning-oriented reporting.

Conclusion

Kenya's progress in education access provides a strong foundation for improving learning outcomes. However, achieving universal foundational literacy and numeracy requires robust data systems, effective use of evidence, and shared accountability mechanisms. By integrating data systems, empowering teachers to use data, aligning stakeholders, and strengthening feedback loops, Kenya can build a more responsive and equitable education system. Lessons from both national programs and global evidence underscore the importance of data-driven, collaborative, and adaptive approaches to improving foundational learning.

References

- African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC). (2023). Education and learning in Kenya: Evidence synthesis. <https://aphrc.org>
- Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better. Harvard Education Press.
- Datnow, A., & Park, V. (2018). Professional collaboration with purpose: Teacher learning towards equitable and excellent schools. Routledge.
- EIDU. (2023). Randomized controlled trial findings from Murang'a County. <https://www.eidu.com>
- Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC). (2021). NASMLA national report.
- Ministry of Education (MoE). (2022). Kenya Education Management Information System (KEMIS). <https://www.kemis.education.go.ke>
- OECD. (2019). Education policy outlook 2019: Working together to help students achieve their potential. <https://www.oecd.org>
- OECD. (2020). Digital education outlook 2020. <https://www.oecd.org>
- Piper, B., Zuilkowski, S. S., & Ong'ele, S. (2018). Implementing structured pedagogy in Kenya: Tusome early grade reading program. RTI International. <https://www.rti.org>
- SHOFCO. (2024). Teacher professional development in informal schools: Program report.
- UNESCO. (2022). Global education monitoring report. <https://www.unesco.org/gem-report>
- Usawa Agenda. (2025). Learning assessment and policy insights report. <https://usawaagenda.org>
- World Bank. (2018). World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise. <https://www.worldbank.org>
- World Bank. (2021). The state of global learning poverty. <https://www.worldbank.org>

National Foundational Learning Conference 2026

23rd – 26th March 2026

Wild Waters, Mombasa